

Use of Ongoing Progress Monitoring to Improve Reading Instruction

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The purpose of frequent progress monitoring

This brief document is written to assist schools as they make decisions about the frequency of progress monitoring assessments for students receiving instructional interventions in reading. Within the RTI model that Florida has adopted to help plan instruction for all students, progress monitoring during the year is used to determine whether or not students are responding adequately to their current instructional environment. If their growth within their current environment is determined to be inadequate, they should experience an instructional change designed to increase their rate of progress. Traditionally, students who are determined to be in need of more intensive interventions have their progress monitored more frequently because it is critical to identify an effective instructional environment as quickly as possible. Many teachers feel that student progress in intensive interventions should be monitored weekly, or even more frequently, in order to provide timely data on which to evaluate the effectiveness of their current instructional procedures. However, there are different types and purposes for progress monitoring, which call for a range in the frequency of administration (e.g., weekly, monthly). These factors associated with progress monitoring are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Issues involved in deciding on the frequency of progress monitoring.

Setting a reasonable interval for progress monitoring actually depends on three pieces of information about the reading assessment being used:

1. How much growth on a given outcome (i.e., oral reading fluency) can be reasonably expected during a given interval of time?
2. How reliably does the assessment measure the outcome of interest?
3. How closely are the different probes of the ability equated for difficulty?

We will use oral reading fluency as an illustrative example. If normative data suggests that we can expect students in effective interventions to increase their rate of oral reading fluency by two words per week, how reliably can we detect that amount of growth by comparing performance on two passages given one week apart? Because measurement of oral reading fluency is not perfectly reliable, and since individual passage probes are typically not perfectly equated for difficulty, expected rates of growth are difficult to detect reliably across the interval of one week. Because of measurement error, a student's score can fluctuate up and down from one testing to the next in a way that makes growth difficult to detect over a short interval of time. Thus, best practice usually requires that teachers observe performance trends across several weeks before making a decision about the effectiveness of the child's current instructional environment.

Research recently conducted at the University of Washington by Joseph Jenkins and his colleagues (Jenkins, Graff, & Miglioretti, 2009) indicates that measuring growth with oral reading fluency probes once every 3 or 4 weeks produces just as reliable an estimate of growth over that period of time as averaging growth from weekly assessments. The findings appear robust, and they provide the possibility for a substantial savings of assessment time when using the RtI approach to guide early reading instruction. The research also showed that measurement accuracy could be improved if more than one probe was administered at each assessment period. In the new *Florida Assessment for Instruction in Reading* system, oral reading fluency passages

have been empirically equated for difficulty, which substantially reduces the need to administer more than one passage at each assessment, since variability across passage difficulty is eliminated. Of course, measurement accuracy can be reduced if a student has an obviously bad “testing day”, but that can be addressed by retesting the student under more favorable circumstances.

General issues about the frequency and utility of different kinds of progress monitoring assessments

Measures like oral reading fluency are referred to as “**general outcome**” curriculum based measures because they assess student proficiency on a general outcome of interest. They have the advantage of being able to determine growth rates for individual students that can be compared against a desirable standard of growth over time. Thus, they can indicate whether or not an intervention is sufficiently powerful to “close the gap” on the outcome measure over a reasonable period of time. Although they provide information about the necessity for a change in a student’s instructional environment, they do not necessarily provide information about how the program should be changed in order to increase student performance.

Information that can be used to suggest ways that instruction should be changed is more likely to be provided by assessments that are very closely tied to the specific curriculum that is being used to guide instruction. This type of assessment, frequently referred to as “**classroom-based formative assessment**”, should be given very frequently to assess whether the student is learning what is being taught. For example, if the student is working to acquire proficiency parsing unfamiliar multi-syllable words as a strategy to improve reading accuracy in second grade, frequent classroom assessments can inform the teacher about the student’s emerging mastery of this strategy, and can possibly identify what parts of it remain particularly difficult. Although this type of assessment has immediate value for making day-to-day adjustments to instruction, it has less value as a measure of general progress in learning to read, since it represents such a small part of the overall reading process. General outcome measures, like oral reading fluency, are more useful for evaluating overall rate of growth in the complete reading process although they also measure only part of what is meant by overall reading competence.

Examples of “ general outcome ” curriculum based measures		Examples of “ classroom-based formative assessment ”
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) – OPM		Unit Tests
Maze Task – OPM		Weekly Quizzes
Reading Comprehension – OPM		Writing Samples
TDI Tasks – OPM*		Informal Inventories

*These tasks form a developmental continuum where 80% mastery is expected. Thus, these are similar to what many teachers might use for classroom-based formative assessment.

In sum, general outcome measures should not be given more frequently than is necessary to establish a reliable estimate of growth. Giving them more frequently than that takes time away from instruction unnecessarily. In contrast, teachers should be constantly (hourly, daily, weekly) acquiring formative assessment data about their student’s progress in mastering their specific lesson objectives.

Reference: Jenkins, J. R., Graff, J. J., & Miglioretti, D. L. (2009). Estimating reading growth using intermittent CBM progress monitoring. *Exceptional Children*, 75, 151-163.